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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ALGIERS 000704

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [AG](#) [ML](#) [NG](#)

SUBJECT: SAHEL SECURITY: MFA SAYS ALGERIA REENGAGING ON
ALGIERS ACCORDS

REF: ALGIERS 422

Classified By: Ambassador Robert S. Ford; reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: In a June 18 discussion with a visiting U.S. delegation led by Bureau of African Affairs Deputy Assistant Secretary Todd Moss, MFA Director General (Assistant Secretary equivalent) for African Affairs Ismail Chergui highlighted Algeria's commitment to the Algiers Accords, but only if the parties involves accept Algeria as the sole mediator. Chergui said that Algeria shares the U.S. interest in fighting Al Qaeda in northern Mali, and asked for help in putting pressure on ATT to follow through on his commitments under the Algiers Accords. According to Chergui, Algeria is encouraging the international community to donate to an economic development subcommittee within the context of the Accords, while believing firmly that replacing Malian military forces with specially trained security units is the key to restoring confidence and security to civilian areas of northern Mali. Both Chergui and DAS Moss viewed the prevalence of fragmented and self-interested units among the Malian military and Tuareg groups as the biggest challenges to the Accords. Moss highlighted American support for the Algiers Accords and the Algerian mediation effort and said the U.S. would look for ways to be helpful. Turning to the Tuareg problems in Niger, Chergui made clear Algeria's preference for dealing with Nigerien president Mamadou Tandja over Malian president Amadou Toumani Toure (ATT), believing Tandja to be "more sincere" despite his weakness. END SUMMARY.

NOT OK TO SEE OTHER PEOPLE

12. (C) As we reported in reftel, Chergui recounted Algeria's displeasure at overtures by Libya and others, attempting to mediate various elements of the Tuareg conflict in northern Mali it felt belonged within the framework of the Algiers Accords. Chergui said Algeria had not been treated faithfully by ATT and the Malian media in particular, and therefore "froze" its role. "We said if you are really not happy with us, we will withdraw," Chergui said, noting that almost immediately, this action triggered a Malian ministerial visit to Algeria, at which time the two nations agreed in principle to reengage on the Algiers Accords. Chergui said Algeria was now ready to resume work, "but only if we are the sole intermediary." Shaking his head, Chergui said that even after these discussions, a delegation of

Libyan, Sudanese and other regional personalities had visited Niger and Mali and even met with ATT himself. "This is not helpful at all," Chergui said, pointing out that Algeria's second condition for reengaging is that the Algiers Accords be binding for all three parties involved - Algeria, Mali and the "Alliance du 23 Mai," the Tuareg representatives who agreed to the Accords. Moss underlined that the U.S. supported the Algiers Accords and Algeria's mediation effort and perceived that Libyan involvement, including payment for hostages, was unhelpful.

WHY CAN'T YOU BE LIKE MAMADOU?

13. (C) Chergui expressed continued frustration with ATT (reftel), questioning his commitment to follow-up on specific provisions of the Accords, and stating his belief that ATT was more focused on a regional conference because it wanted others to "bear witness to their own troubles" rather than actually taking action. By contrast, Chergui said Algeria was "satisfied with what we have in Niger." Although conceding Tandja's material weakness and need for Algerian and international support, Chergui praised Tandja's integrity and clearly saw him as a more trustworthy interlocutor. "We must do justice to Tandja," he said, noting he was the first to propose a regional conference, and "is very good in the fight against terrorism." DAS Moss pointed out that Tandja lacked the military capability to handle the situation in northern Niger and that Tandja did not even see the Sahel as a security issue but rather as a local problem of smuggling and contraband. Chergui agreed, believing that the influence

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of other countries through the regional ministerial preparatory meeting in Niger and the proposed heads of state meeting in Bamako could steer Tandja's perspective towards broader regional security. "Only through results and action on the field can we convince him," Chergui concluded. He added that Algeria also had "no doubt" about the commitment of another neighbor, Mauritania, to efforts to enhance regional security.

THE WAY FORWARD FOR NORTHERN MALI

14. (C) The Algerian view of the way forward, according to Chergui, falls into two phases. The first phase involves bringing all disparate Tuareg groups back into the May 23 Alliance, which would be a challenge since "there are many contradictory messages coming from Mali, with everyone acting for themselves." The second phase concerning Mali, Chergui said, was the "full and formal" engagement of ATT himself, to demonstrate to Algeria and others that he is sticking to the Accords. On the international front, Chergui said Algeria is committed to a conference of regional neighbors that would include Algeria, Mali, Niger, Mauritania, Chad, Libya and Burkina Faso. The goal of this conference would be a mechanism for permanent cooperation between these countries, in security, food aid, humanitarian assistance and development projects.

15. (C) In Chergui's view, there were three things that Algeria, the U.S. and others can do to ameliorate the tenuous situation in northern Mali. First, establish special security units, so that when civilian areas in the north are demilitarized, police functions will be in place and will restore the confidence of a population many of whom fled into the mountains after the recent killing of a military commander in Kidal. Second, withdraw Malian troops from those civilian population centers, especially Kidal. Chergui's third area for cooperation was to encourage economic development projects and assistance.

CHALLENGES IN TRAINING MALIAN SPECIAL SECURITY UNITS

16. (C) According to Chergui, Algeria has an active military training program for Malian troops, although it was focused more on standing up special security units to serve as police forces. These units, Chergui said, would offer permanent employment to people who know the area very well, and would transform those who had previously taken up arms against the government into a "tool in the hands of the system." Chergui said that 220 out of a planned 600 Malians were finishing their training in Mali at present. The problem, he said, was that people were afraid of the army but had no confidence in the security units, since Mali created two units "on paper only," weak in resources, equipment and facilities. Chergui said Algeria had offered to help train them, but Mali politely refused, wanting to handle the job on its own. "We do not want to impose," Chergui said, suggesting that perhaps the U.S. should discuss greater engagement in training these units with ATT. Above all, he said, Algeria and the U.S. should help pressure the Malians to make these units a reality. Meanwhile, Chergui shared DAS Moss' view that the Malian military "had the right" to move freely within its own borders, but that a visible and active military presence was "unhelpful" to winning over the population and achieving sustainable security in the region.

JUMP-STARTING ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

17. (C) Chergui shared frustration expressed by members of DAS Moss' delegation that, due to a weak security situation, development projects in northern Mali often wound up stillborn, looted within months of construction. Still, he asserted that small projects "send the right signals" to the local population, and outlined Algeria's efforts to solicit international aid. The Algiers Accords, Chergui explained, provided for several subcommittees to drive implementation forward at the working level. Up until now, Chergui lamented

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that "only the security subcommittee" had actually been active. He went on to say that Algeria was committed to re-energizing the development subcommittee, and had already contributed at least USD 1 million to its fund. So far, Chergui said Algeria was the only country to contribute to the fund, although it had reached out for contributions to countries such as China, Japan, Canada and others. The development fund, Chergui explained, targeted some 2400 former rebels who had handed over their arms.

REBUILDING THE TUAREG ALLIANCE

18. (C) Responding to DAS Moss' query about how to handle Tuareg rebel leader Ibrahim ag Bahanga, Chergui asserted that Algeria was trying to bring him back into the alliance, along with all of the other Tuareg groups. Chergui asserted that, despite doubts on many sides about Bahanga's sincerity and intentions, it was "not wise" to reopen a debate on whether or not he belongs within the alliance. With time, Chergui believed, "we will see if there is enough unity on the Tuareg side, but for now we want to stick to the Algiers Accords." Chergui repeated his request that the U.S. help put pressure on ATT to honor his commitments and to demilitarize the northern part of the country. Chergui said that Algeria was grateful for the visit of the DAS Moss delegation, and emphasized the need for further coordination to ensure that the complex web of actors concerned with the stability of the Sahel were all sending the same message. Chergui highlighted the importance of the Algerian ambassador in Bamako as a key interlocutor.

COMMENT

19. (C) The Algerians were genuinely pleased to have these consultations about the situation on their borders; it is the first time an interagency delegation from Washington has come

here to consult on strategy regarding non-Middle Eastern regional security issues in at least two years, if not much longer. Chergui was quite familiar with the different actors and angles. He is soon to leave his MFA position as senior Africa hand, and it is not clear who will replace him as the lead Sahel policy implementer. This might reduce the MFA's role for a period vis-a-vis the Algerian military intelligence organization which also has a big hand in Algerian Sahel policy. (The meeting between the Moss delegation and the Algerian military intelligence was useful and had a positive tone, and we will report it separately.)

110. (U) This cable has been cleared by DAS Todd Moss.

FORD